

Academy for Success Background

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Increase the academic achievement in reading and math, especially for "disengaged" students who are at risk of dropping out of school, by developing a regional educationally innovative program of choice that will operate in geographic clusters in existing buildings. This Academy for Success will decrease the barriers to academic achievement among students with attendance, credit recovery, or lack of engagement issue (Regional Choice Four).

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This choice option will address the challenge of engaging the students who are low performing or under achieving students who are most at risk of dropping out of high school. Students who may be physically present in their classes but not connected to the learning process either intellectually or emotionally. These students exist in all schools, but especially in low performing schools. This choice will offer zero tolerance for student failure.

Designed to reduce the number of students dropping out of high school and provide direct links to post-secondary studies and careers, RC IV will include several strands, all operating in existing closed or operating school buildings in geographic clusters of Beaver County

The Beaver County Regional Academy for Success will be a model 21st century program that dramatically alters traditional learning environments. RCI IV's design will be based on educational best practices, industry and academic partnerships, organizational innovations and technological advances. The mission of the Beaver County Regional Academy for Success will be to prepare each student for success in his or her chosen post-secondary career path by producing scholars skilled in problem-solving strategies, thinkers who discriminate and integrate information, collaborators skilled in marshalling resources and building consensus for action, and leaders who plan, design and execute decisions in a comprehensive program of studies focused on individual achievement.

Academically, the program will offer a rigorous curriculum with students taking four years of Mathematics, Science, Language Arts and Social Studies. Traditional content areas will be grouped into clusters to support curriculum integration through performance-based project learning experiences. The instructional program will be a blend of live instruction and cyber services. Instructional time will be reconfigured to provide extended learning opportunities. Exemplary instructional materials will be chosen based on their interdisciplinary and project-based orientation. Annual standardized assessments, content area common assessments, and project reports will require students to articulate their understanding and mastery of a topic both orally and in writing. The Academy for Success will also incorporate a strong focus on the arts. Increasing brain based research evidence points to the strong link between student participation in the arts and academic achievement.

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The students will ...

1. Engage in performance-based course work, benchmarked against PA Standards of achievement.
2. Learn constructivist thinking and problem-solving skills through project-based curricula.
3. Participate in academic and career decisions that will establish personal achievement goals.
4. Participate in yearly course-embedded apprenticeship programs that provide authentic learning opportunities outside the classroom.
5. Participate in mentoring.
6. Complete a rigorous and diversified learning experience that blends content knowledge and skill with goal setting and collaborative problem-solving techniques and performance tasks that extend beyond the classroom.

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This identifiable target group of students with 1) attendance 2) credit recovery issues or 3) a general lack of engagement (often described as apathy) in their school's regular program will also benefit from specific training in self-regulation skills – a unique approach that would place them in charge of their own academic behavior.

This opportunity is related to “new knowledge” concerning the developmental nature of the brain. MRI-based brain research has shown that the brain, itself, is developmental. This new understanding of how the brain works suggests that for some students, the very skills that they need to discipline themselves to do the work related to academic achievement are not in place – yet. It is this “yet” that provides the opportunity. Under the guidance of teachers who are willing to scaffold the development of needed maturational skills, students will have a chance to “get their act together” in the context of their academic work. Students' grades will consist of “A”, “B” and “Not Yet”. Every “Not Yet” student will be given multiple opportunities to improve.

Students will not only develop important life-skills but will be in the best position to take on the challenging work of learning that translates into increased academic achievement. Students will set goals to improve their academic performance on an on-going basis.

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Two strands will be implemented for low performing students with attendance, course recovery or general lack of engagement issues. Strand One: Academy for Success: a unique educational program in which failure is not an option. Strand Two: Coordination and improvements to existing placements to make them available choices.

This choice will address the challenge of engaging those students who are most at risk of dropping out of high school. They are the students with poor attendance, credit recovery needs, and general overall disengagement who exist in all schools, but especially in low performing schools. This choice will offer zero tolerance for student failure. Arranged as a sequential, progressively more aggressive pyramid of interventions, Regional Choice Four will provide a web of support options for students to experience success.